

One Hundred and  
Seventy-Five Years  
in the Life of a Church

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To the Rev.

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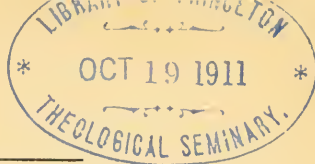
With sincere esteem  
and compliments of

Samuel A. Harlow.









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ONE HUNDRED AND  
SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS  
IN THE LIFE OF A CHURCH

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**Historical Sermon**

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DELIVERED ON THE ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN HASSANIMISCO PLANTATION, NOW GRAFTON, MASSACHUSETTS DECEMBER THE THIRTIETH, 1906 BY SAMUEL ALLEN HARLOW, PASTOR OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, AT GRAFTON, MASS.

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The Davis Press  
Worcester



THE town of Grafton occupies a portion of territory which used to be called the Nipmuck country. The Nipmuck Indians of which the Hassanimisco Indians were a branch, seem to have been less warlike than many of the neighboring tribes, and the Rev. John Eliot who commenced his labors at Natick in 1646 among the Indians of that place, found them ready to listen to the preaching of the gospel. The Nipmuck Indians were most friendly with the Natick Indians, and Eliot in a letter to the Corporation of London in 1649, describing his work among the Indians says: "A Nipnet Sachem hath submitted himself to the Lord, and much desires one of our chief ones to live with him and those that are with him." Within a few years after this the great Apostle to the New England Indians visited this section, for in 1654 the General Court, on the petition of Eliot, set this town apart for the use of the Indians.

For a number of years after this Eliot often visited this locality, and carried on his work with such fruitfulness that on September 23, 1671, an Indian church was formed in the town, which was the second organization of the kind in Massachusetts. The church was organized by Eliot himself, or by some one acting under his direction. The church grew in numbers, and the Indian reservation of Hassanimisco came to be the center of a large and wide-spread Christian influence.

A school was established for the study of the Bible in the Indian language. The chief ruler of the Nipmuck country lived here. Maj. Daniel Gookin, who was a friend of the Indians, visited Hassanimisco in company with Eliot in 1674, and gives us the following picture of this interesting Indian village: "This village is not inferior unto any of the Indian plantations for rich land and plenty of meadow, being well tempered and watered."

"Their ruler is named Ananeakin, a sober and discreet man. Their teacher's name is Tuckappawillin, his brother, a pious and able man, and apt to teach. Their aged father whose name I remember not, is a grave and sober Christian, and deacon of the church. They have a brother that lives in the town, called James, that was bred among the English, and employed as a pressman in printing the Indian Bible, who can read well, and as I take it write also. The father, mother, brothers and their wives, are all reputed pious persons. Here they have a meeting house for the worship of God after the English fashion of building, and two or three other houses after the same mode, but they fancy not greatly to live in them. Their way of living is by husbandry and keeping cattle and swine; wherein they do as well or rather better than any other Indians, but are yet very far short of the English both in diligence and providence. There are in full communion in the church and living in town about sixteen men and women, and about thirty baptized persons; but there are several others, members of this church, that live in other places. This is a hopeful plantation."

So great was the educational and missionary activity of this Indian community that in 1674, three

years after the organization of the church, seven new villages of praying Indians were formed in different places around Hassanimisco. One of the members of the native church in this town, whose English name was James the Printer, and afterwards, James Printer, rendered Eliot immense service in assisting him to set up the type of his famous Indian Bible. He was educated in the Indian school at Cambridge, and apprenticed to Samuel Greene to learn the printer's trade. Eliot, in a letter to Hon. Robert Boyle of London, 1682, accords him honorable mention for his great service. Afterwards, in 1709, Printer and a son of Samuel Greene published a Psalter in the Indian and English languages. James Printer at one time served the native church as a teacher. The period upon which our attention has been fixed was one of peace, prosperity, growth and influence for the little Indian reservation of Hassanimisco. But dark and troublous days were in store for its people. This is not the occasion, however, to describe at length the calamities and sufferings which befell the community.

The story of King Philip and his disastrous war with the whites moves one deeply with its pathos and horror. Philip was the son of the noble hearted Massasoit, who, with his braves, marched to Plymouth between three and four months after the Pilgrims landed, and entered into a league with the new colony which lasted in an unbroken friendship for over forty years. Philip himself at first assumed a friendly attitude toward the English. The hanging of three of his own tribe, however, by the white men, without sufficient justification in his eyes, and the deep seated dislike in his breast of the

encroachments upon Indian territory by the English, and his dread of their future supremacy, as well as the war spirit of his young men, decided him at last to take up arms against the whites. There could be but one outcome of such a struggle. In the end the English were sure to conquer. But it was not an easily won victory. The war was wide-spread and terribly destructive. The English suffered grievously. Whole villages were wiped out of existence. Fire and massacre wrought destruction and death in scores of happy, peaceful and prosperous towns. Women and children were burned in their homes, or wantonly killed; and the farmer never knew in what hour his foe might shoot him down, or spring unseen from some ambush. In this dreadful war of races a dozen towns were completely destroyed, and scores suffered more or less by fire and massacre. "We will fight to the last man before we will become servants to the English" was the cry of one of the great chiefs. The tide of war began at last to turn, and Philip found himself, little by little, deserted by allies. He became a fugitive, hiding in caves, forests, and swamps. When his wife and son were taken prisoners he cried out in despair and sorrow, "My heart breaks. Now I am ready to die." Not long after this Philip was shot by a traitor Indian while hiding in a swamp, and his head carried to Plymouth where it was exhibited on a pole for a number of years. I am told that one of the Indian skirmishes during King Philip's war was fought on land now belonging to Mr. David L. Fiske.

The village of Hassanimisco suffered severely in the Indian uprising. A large number of the Christian Indians of their own free will, or by compulsion,

joined the forces of King Philip. It is just possible that "blood which is thicker than water" may have had something to do with their casting in their lot with their own race. Some of the natives, however, remained loyal to the English throughout the war; while others, after fighting against the whites for a time, returned to their former friendly relations. Those who remained hostile were punished when captured. The chief of the Nipmucks, who lived here, and through whose influence some of the Christian Indians were persuaded to fight against the whites, was taken captive and carried to Boston where he was put to death.

Thus the prosperous, and Christian plantation of the Hassanimisco Indians was overwhelmed in utter desolation and ruin; and the church which had sent its bright rays of Christianizing influence abroad into the surrounding darkness, and has helped to make the name of Eliot imperishable, was so broken and scattered that it ceased to have an existence.

A number of years after this devastating war, a mere handful of Indians wandered back to this hilltop where, in other days, their wigwams clustered in a happy and unmolested settlement, and the sound of Christian prayer and worship floated out over these hills and valleys. In 1698, twenty-one years after King Philip's war, according to the Report of Commissioners of this Province, there were only five Indian families living on the old Hassanimisco reservation. James Pinter, who had rendered Eliot such fine service in the printing of his Indian Bible, was one of the Indians then living in this town. He was a man of unusual intelligence, and of upright character, and was the teacher of the little community

which had gathered here. The Indians now were without a church or a school, and their numbers increased but little. There sprang up a movement, about this time, on the part of the English settlers in this town, and in Shrewsbury, Marlborough, and other places, to secure possession of the land still owned by the surviving members of the old Hassanimisco tribe. For two or three years the subject was discussed by those interested in the project, and the matter was at last laid before the General Court of Massachusetts in the form of a petition by inhabitants of Shrewsbury, Marlborough, Concord, Ipswich and other towns. The General Court appointed a committee to look into the matter and report. This committee visited Hassanimisco, consulted with the members of the tribe, and brought back the report that the Indians were willing to sell all land which they did not care to cultivate. After various delays the General Court in December, 1727, granted the petitioners the right to purchase, and the Indians to sell, some 7,500 acres upon certain conditions. The forty proprietors were to pay to Trustees appointed by the General Court, the sum of £2500, the interest of which was to be paid to the members of the tribe as the General Court should order and direct. The deed of purchase also gave to the Indians the farms which were already under their cultivation, "together with one hundred acres more of land there, to be the present Indian Proprietors', their heirs and assigns forever." Of this land there now remains, on Brigham Hill, some three or four acres, in the possession of James L. and Lewis S. Ciscoe, the descendants of the Hassanimisco Indians.

On March 19, 1727, the transfer of the land by the Indians was consummated, and Ami Printer, Moses Printer, Peter Muckamaug and Sarah his wife, besides five other native Indians made their marks opposite their names, and ground which had been trodden by the moccasined feet of the Red Man, passed into the possession of a race which already had commenced to mould into fresh and original forms the life of this Western continent.

Certain conditions were imposed upon those who had bought the Indian lands. The white proprietors were required "to make a settlement in the town of forty English families; each of whom should build a good habitable house, and break up and fence at least four acres of land within three years." They were required, also, "That within ye space of three years, they build and finish a meeting house for ye publick worship of God, and build a school house for ye instruction as well of ye Indians as English children, and settle a learned Orthodox Minister and Schoo' master among them; and yt all ye above articles shall be without charge to ye Indian natives."

The meeting-house was built within the next three or four years and was first used for religious services and town meetings in the winter of 1730, or the early spring of 1731. The school-house was built in the autumn of the same year. The new settlement prospered and grew in numbers and its inhabitants thinking that it had become of sufficient size and importance to become a town, petitioned the General Court that it might be constituted a separate town. On April 17, 1735, between seven and eight years after its purchase from the Indians, the House of Representatives passed an act author-

izing and empowering "the Freeholders and other qualified voters to assemble to make choice of Town Officers." The next day, April 18, the act received the endorsement of Governor J. Belcher, and Council as follows: "Ordered, That the plantation of Hassanimisco, in the county of Worcester, as the same is hereafter bounded and described, be and hereby is set off and constituted a separate and distinct township by the name of Grafton." It is not known exactly how the name Grafton came to be given to the new town. It frequently happened that the House of Representatives omitted the names of the new towns, in the acts of corporation, and left the omission to be supplied by the Governor and council. It has been suggested that Governor Belcher designed to bestow a compliment upon Charles Fitz Roy, Duke of Grafton, and a grandson of Charles II, and a man who had possibly shown, in some way, an interest in the Massachusetts colony.

Through various vicissitudes of a profoundly interesting character, we have briefly traced the history of the old Hassanimisco plantation. We now come to the time when the church organized one hundred and seventy-five years ago by the English settlers, began its historic life as a religious and spiritual force in the community. One of the conditions upon which the forty proprietors secured possession of the town from the Indians was that a meeting-house should be built within three years, and that a "learned orthodox minister" should be settled.

The first meeting-house stood near the center of our present Common, a little to the south. It was a very plain structure, with porches one story



and a half high on three sides. Stairs led from the porches to the galleries on each side of the house. The church was furnished at first with only nine or ten pews; benches being used in the remaining space. These pews resembled large boxes, with seats on three sides, and they were so high-backed, and shut in the people from view so completely that they came to be called "pits." The pulpit towered above the people and was equipped with a huge sounding board which was a constant source of wonder to the youth of the congregation.

As the deed of purchase required that the Indians were to be free of all charge to support the preaching, they were seated after considerable discussion near the entrances of the church. In 1832 this meeting-house was removed from the common, a short distance west of its old site, and is now known as the "Arcade," and is used as a dwelling house and a business block.

On the fly leaf of the first records of the church of Grafton one reads as follows: "A Book of the Records of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ at Hassanimisco gathered the 28 of December Anno Domini 1731." We here touch the fountain head of whatever history we, as a church, have been making the past one hundred and seventy-five years. It is profoundly suggestive to note the name by which the first church of Grafton was called. It went under no special or distinctive denominational name. It was, unquestionably, Congregational in its polity; but it was organized under the simple and comprehensive name of "The church of our Lord Jesus Christ at Hassanimisco." And this was the term used, in that day, when referring to the

churches of Shrewsbury, or Westboro, and elsewhere—“the church of our Lord Jesus Christ” or sometimes, in abbreviation, “the church of Christ.” The formal organization of the church is described in the Records under date of December 28, 1731. It reads as follows:

“A church of our Lord Jesus Christ being about to be gathered in this place, the candidates for the church were by the Reverend Elders” (observe, please, the use of the word Elders as applied to the ministers) “and beloved messengers in Council assembled, desired to bring their certificates from the churches which they respectfully belonged unto which are as follows:” Then follow the admission by letter of different persons from Ipswich Hamlet, Framingham, Shrewsbury, Sutton, Sudbury, Cambridge, Marlborough, and Westborough, Mass. The whole number who were admitted at this time was twenty or twenty-two.

The Rev. Solomon Prentice, Pastor-Elect, united by letter from the church of Christ in Cambridge. The certificates having been presented, the Council then proceeded to organize these persons into the church of the Lord Jesus Christ in Hassanimisco. The following day, December 29, the Rev. Solomon Prentice was ordained as pastor over the newly organized church. The Rev. Ebenezer Parkman of Westborough offered the opening prayer; the Rev. Nathaniel Appleton of Cambridge preached the sermon; the Rev. Mr. Smith of Framingham offered the ordaining prayer; the Rev. Mr. Loring of Sudbury gave the right hand of fellowship, and the Rev. Caleb Trowbridge of Groton joined in the laying on of hands.

It may be interesting to know in what form the members of the first church of Christ in Grafton

embodied their religious and doctrinal beliefs. It was, by no means, an elaborate theological statement. It was simple, explicit, and more confessional and experimental than is the modern expression of religious belief. It summarized briefly, but comprehensively, the fundamental points around which the churches of Christ in New England centered their religious life. In the old records of the church this statement of belief is set forth under what was called, "The Foundation Church Covenant." I will read a few selections.

"We, whose names are herewith subscribed, inhabitants of Hassanimisco, in New England, knowing that we are very prone to offend God the most high, both in heart and life, through the prevalency of sin that dwelleth within us, and the manifold temptations from without us; for which we have great reason to be unfeignedly humble before Him from day to day, do in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, with dependence upon the gracious assistance of his holy spirit, solemnly enter into a covenant with God and one another according to God, as follows:"

Seven articles of the Covenant then follow. One reads: "We bind ourselves to bring up our children and servants in the knowledge and fear of God by his instructions according to our best abilities and in special by the use of our common orthodox Catechism that the true religion may be maintained in our families while we live; yea, and among such as shall live when we are dead and gone."

The third article says: "We promise to keep close to the truth of Christ endeavoring with lively affection towards it in our hearts to defend it against all opposers thereof; which, that we may do, we

resolve to use the holy Scriptures as our Platform whereby we discern the mind and will of Christ and not the new found inventions of men." In the fifth article those who signed the covenant promise to observe the two seals—"Baptism and the Lord's Supper." The Rev. Solomon Prentice was settled upon a salary of £90, which was afterwards increased to £100. In a "Title of Real Estate on South street, in Grafton Mass., from the Hassanamesit Indians in 1727 to Arthur A. Simmons in 1894," as compiled with great care by Mr. Simmons, and which I have examined with much interest, we learn that the proprietors of the town assigned forty acres of land to Mr. Prentice. The "Minister's Lott" as it was called, extended from the south line of the meeting-house lot south to a point between the present estates of Dr. Robert Lilley and the late Mr. S. A. Forbush. The house in which Mr. Prentice lived stood between the homes of Mrs. Geo. W. Fisher and Mr. Albert L. Fisher. The present parsonage therefore, occupies a portion of the original grant of land to the first minister of this town.

The Rev. Solomon Prentice was born in Cambridge, Mass., May 11, 1705, and was graduated at Harvard College in 1727. He was twenty-six years of age when he entered upon the pastorate of this church. In 1740 George Whitefield visited this country, and Mr. Prentice became an ardent admirer of the great English evangelist. It is said his invitation to Whitefield to occupy his pulpit created severe criticism, and this act, together with his liberality in admitting lay preachers into his pulpit, and also certain extreme religious utterances, led to such opposition and division among the members that

a council was called in 1744 to consider the matter. A large number of charges,—some thirty in all—were brought against Mr. Prentice. None of these charges reflected in the slightest way upon his moral character. They all referred to certain expressions and peculiar teachings which were regarded by the council as unscriptural and erratic. One charge brought against him was that he asked: “To what purpose is it to preach to an unregenerate man? To tell him he must not kill, must not steal, must not do these and those things? For he has no power to resist them; for he is the devil’s slave and vassal, and doeth just what the devil would have him do.” This teaching was considered by the council as “carrying the matter too far.” Another charge was that he had said, “Some ministers would advise some persons in distress to pray; which he said was abominable.” After prolonged and stormy sessions, lasting for nine days, the council, after condemning certain teachings, and cautioning him for the future, finally decided to exhort the disaffected members of the church to forget all past grievances and to sit peaceably under the ministrations of Mr. Prentice. The apparently amicable settlement of the difficulties of the church did not last long. No real and permanent reconciliation had taken place. The people charged Mr. Prentice with not following the advice of the council in all particulars. He replied that it never had been his intention to do so, for the reason that it would have been contrary to his conscience. The church was again thrown into a state of dissatisfaction. Council after council was held without any fruitful result. Painful and distressing times followed for the church and pastor, until Mr. Prentice made it known that

“he was discouraged in his station,” and would welcome a dismissal. A council was called July 10, 1747, by whose advice he was dismissed. In his letter to this council, he alludes in a most touching way to his trials, and after manifesting a tender and loving interest in the members of the church, he expresses the hope that he may still continue in the sacred office of the ministry, “if it might be for the glory of God, and the spiritual good of His church and people.” The Rev. Mr. Prentice subsequently preached in Easton, Bellingham, and Hull. In the autumn of 1772 he returned to Grafton, and died in May of the following year in the sixty-eighth year of his age. He was buried in the old cemetery of the town. Mr. Prentice was called by the people in his days a “New Light.” The exact meaning of the term is obscure, but it is thought to refer to the inner light, or knowledge, which some of the revivalists and lay preachers of the day claimed to possess. I have tried to form a picture in my mind of this first minister of the Church of Christ in Hassanimisco. I think I understand him in a measure. He was of a highly impressionable nature; ardent, impulsive, and emotional in temperament, with a tinge of mysticism. It is not surprising that a man of his temperament should have been deeply moved by the dramatic and persuasive preaching of Whitefield, when we remember that Governor Belcher kissed and wept over the great evangelist when he left Boston.

Solomon Prentice may not always have balanced truth with care, and he was doubtless indiscreet and extreme, at times, in his religious utterances. That he was a man of deep spirituality, high ideals, noble aims, and profoundly anxious to lead his people into

the deeper and richer experiences of the Christian life, I have no doubt. He stands out as a true, faithful, high-minded minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. May his memory always be cherished.

The people in the time of Mr. Prentice were not permitted to choose their own pews and seats in the meeting-house, and were under the necessity of taking those which were assigned to them by a committee. This assignment which occurred from time to time, was called "seating the meeting-house," and the seats were assigned to the congregation "according to estate and age." The seats in the box pews ran around three sides and hung on hinges. During the long prayer, when the congregation stood, they were raised; and the youthful attendants hailed with delight the general slamming which was the signal that they could once more sit down. The custom prevailed for the congregation to turn around and face the choir; and the town clerk would announce in church, for three successive Sundays, the names of those who intended to marry. There was no way to heat the meeting-house on the Common, and the people after the morning service would go over to the hotel and warm their feet before the great fire place with its blazing logs, and then go back to listen to the second sermon in the afternoon. The music was led by a choir, and at first, a violin. The instrumental part of the choir grew in numbers as time went on, and during the pastorates of Mr. Miles and Mr. Biscoe, there was an orchestra of several pieces,—a violin, a base viol, a cello, and a clarinet.

The church was without a pastor for three years after the dismissal of Mr. Prentice. June 6, 1750, Mr. Aaron Hutchinson, of Hebron, Conn., was ordained

the second pastor of the church. He was graduated at Yale college, and was honored with the degree of Master of Arts from Harvard and Dartmouth Colleges. He served the church for twenty-two years with marked ability. He was a strong Calvinist, severe in his theological views, and inclined at times to controversy. He was an excellent classical scholar, and he sometimes carried on his recitations with young men while ploughing in the field. He had a remarkable memory, and would often conduct the service of the church without opening a book. He would ask the congregation to follow him with their Bibles or hymn books. He was a man of rather eccentric and brusque manners, which evidently did not always please the people. It was during his pastorate that the church adopted the use of Watt's Psalms and his first and third book of hymns, as well as a number of authorized tunes. A chorister was also chosen. Mr. Hutchinson closed his pastorate November 17, 1772, and removed to Pomfret, Vt., where he supplied various churches until his death September 1, 1800, at the age of seventy-six years.

The Rev. Mr. Hutchinson was succeeded in the pastorate by the Rev. Daniel Grosvenor. He was born in Pomfret, Conn., and graduated at Yale College in 1769. He was settled over the church in Grafton October 19, 1774. His ministry covered the stirring times of the Revolutionary War. He was an ardent patriot, and he gave signal proof of his interest in the cause of the colonies by "leaving his pulpit, taking his musket, and joining the company of minute men that went to Cambridge on the 19th of April." Mr. Grosvenor was a man of winsome



personality. His manners were courteous, affable, and dignified. His fine conversational power, readiness of wit, and fund of anecdotes made him a great favorite in the social circle, and a delightful companion. In the pulpit he was fluent and vivacious. He avoided doctrinal preaching. The church was harmonious under his ministry, and when at the end of fourteen years he asked for a dismissal, owing to the loss of his voice, the request was granted with the greatest reluctance. After Mr. Grosvenor recovered his voice he preached in Paxton for eight years; then removed to Petersham where he died July 1834, at the advanced age of eighty-four years.

The church was without a settled pastor for nine years after the dismissal of Mr. Grosvenor. It then called the Rev. John Miles. Mr. Miles was born in Westminster, Mass., November 3, 1765, and was graduated at Brown University, 1794. He was ordained as the fourth pastor of the church October 12, 1796. The number of people who gathered to witness his ordination and settlement was so large that the services were held in the open air on the Common. Mr. Miles was the minister of the church for thirty years. It was a period which embraced, "beyond doubt, the most embarrassing and trying portion of the history of the Massachusetts Congregational churches, and under his ministrations it was in a united and prosperous condition." Mr. Miles held rather liberal theological views. The care of the public schools fell largely to his supervision, and he devoted a great deal of time to their interests.

The movement toward more liberal theological views had been gathering momentum in the churches of Massachusetts, and when discussions and dissensions

arose in the church and town of Grafton, Mr. Miles asked to be dismissed. His pastorate closed October 1825, and he removed to Shrewsbury where he lived until his death in March 1849, aged eighty-four years.

The year following the dismissal of Mr. Miles the church called, September 21, 1826, the Rev. Joseph Searle. Mr. Searle was born in Rowley, Mass., 1797, and graduated at Princeton College in 1821. He was the minister of this church for five and a half years. Two of our number, Mrs. Elizabeth W. Flagg and Mrs. Martha H. Dodge, united with the church during his pastorate.

After eighty years his gentleness and amiability are vividly remembered. To the young he was approachable and friendly. He was a deeply spiritual man. The conversion of his people was a cause of constant solicitude and labor. His eyes would fill with tears as he talked of the spiritual condition of the church. The following incident has been told me by one who clearly remembers it. It made a lasting impression upon her mind. Mr. Searle was once speaking to her, when a girl, about uniting with the church at a time when there was considerable religious interest among the people. She told him that she might possibly wait until another Communion. "Suppose you should not live until another Communion," was the reply. His pastorate of less than six years was one of the most fruitful in the history of the church. One hundred and sixty-two persons—young and adult—were added to the membership. His ministry was blessed with one of the most extensive revivals the church has known.

I have been reading recently, a sermon published in 1828, by request of the Grafton and Westborough

churches, on the subject of Slander, from Prov. 26:20. "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out; so where there is no tale-bearer, the strife ceaseth." It indicates a mind of high order; a close student of human nature; and in diction and imagery possesses a literary charm which shows Mr. Searle had gone to the fountains of "English pure and undefiled" for his style. Influences to which there has already been allusion, made themselves felt in a more decided manner during Mr. Searle's pastorate and finally led to his leaving the church. To quote from a brief history of the church published in 1842: "At the close of the Rev. Mr. Searle's ministry, the church and a part of the society, finding that there was no probability of their continuing to enjoy the ministrations of an evangelical pastor while connected with the parish, seceded from it, and made provision for the preaching of the gospel in its purity, by the erection of a commodious house of worship." Mr. F. C. Pierce in his admirable history of Grafton says; "The church in a body, with a large minority of the parish, withdrew, thereby relinquishing their right as members of the First Congregational Society." Into the discussion of this separation it is not at all necessary to enter. We profoundly wish that it might never have happened. That there were prolonged discussions, animated and intense, there is no doubt. But there was one great infelicity in the whole system of church life in Massachusetts, in those days, which we are profoundly thankful has ceased to exist. The town was virtually the parish, and its inhabitants, who were assessed for the support of religion, had the legal right to vote on church and ecclesiastical affairs. That day, most fortunately, has passed. The separa-

tion of churches into Unitarian and Orthodox went on at this time, throughout New England, with considerable rapidity. The Massachusetts General Association in 1836, as stated by Prof. Williston Walker in his History of Congregationalism, reported "eighty-one cases of church division, and property valued at \$600,000 left in the possession of the Unitarians." The men and women who felt compelled to go out from the original "Church of the Lord Jesus Christ" in old Hassanimisco had, for a time, no house of worship. They climbed at first, the stairs which led up on the outside of the ell of the present home of Mr. Roswell A. Smith, to a hall or room where they gathered for their services. The people used to call it "going to Upton," when they went there to worship. Afterwards they held their services in the dance hall of the old hotel; and then upon the invitation of the Baptist church, they worshipped in the vestry of that church.

The Rev. John Wilde was called to succeed the Rev. Mr. Searle. Mr. Wilde has born in Dorchester in 1803, graduated at Middlebury College, Vt., in 1827, and at Andover Theological Seminary in 1831. He was installed pastor of the Evangelical Congregational Church, June 20, 1832 and resigned seven years afterwards, and removed to Conway, N. H., on account of the health of his wife. He preached afterwards in Maine, but his own health failing him he visited California. On his return east he had charge of the Laurel Bank Seminary, Deposit, N. Y., and subsequently opened a school in Stamford, Conn. He was again compelled to give up active work on account of feeble health, and he removed with his wife and daughter to Alexandria,

Va., where he died February 10, 1868 at the age of sixty-five years. He was a man of scholarly tastes as is shown by his work after leaving Grafton. Mr. Wilde married shortly after his installation, Miss Julia M. Forbes, the daughter of Deacon Jonathan Forbes of Westborough. Her father built the house, probably for his daughter, in which Mr. Arthur A. Simmons now lives. It was during the pastorate of Mr. Wilde that the present church was built at a cost of \$8,400.

The Rev. Thomas C. Biscoe was installed the seventh pastor of the church July 18, 1838. He was born in Cambridge July 18, 1810, and graduated at Amherst college in 1831. After teaching one year at the Academy at Brattleboro, Vt., he devoted three years to theological studies and was licensed to preach in 1835. The pastorate of Mr. Biscoe was one of signal ability and large accessions to the church. During the thirty years of his pastorate four hundred and forty were added to the membership. His pulpit ministrations were of such a forceful and impressive character that they made a lasting impression upon those who heard him. He was a Calvinist of a rather severe type, and he delivered his message with a profound sense of its vast reality and solemnity. The people heard in full, unmuffled sound, the thunders of the law. I sometimes think it would be a good thing if they reverberated a little louder in our day. There is no doubt that such preaching, stiff and uncompromising as it was, put back-bone into men, and moulded them often, into large and heroic types of Christian manhood. Mr. Biscoe fitted admirably into an age and an atmosphere when men were capable of receiving strong meat,

although some found it, even then, pretty hard to fully digest at times. He was a forceful personality. He had an exalted sense of the dignity of the minister's position, and he did not hesitate to make it known. Stern as was his style of preaching, he was by no means averse to social life; and he was ever ready to tell an anecdote, or indulge in pleasantry, and he could laugh right heartily at a good joke. He was a fine sermonizer, a stimulating preacher, and a pastor who was profoundly impressed with the seriousness and responsibility of his duty. His is a figure which will always stand out in the history of the church in a commanding way, as a most able and faithful and successful minister of the gospel.

On September 29, 1868, the Rev. John H. Windsor D. D., was installed pastor of the church. He was born in England and came to this country with his parents in 1844. He graduated at Iowa College, July 12, 1854,—and from Andover Theological Seminary August 6, 1857. He labored for six years, under the Home Missionary Society, in Iowa, and subsequently served the First Parish at Saco, Me. The pastorate of Dr. Windsor was marked by delightful harmony between minister and people. He easily won the esteem and affection of the people by his friendliness of spirit, and the affability of his manners. He mingled dignity with cordiality; pleasantry with a fine seriousness. The preaching of Dr. Windsor was of a practical, helpful character, and showed the influence of the new age into which the church was moving. His week day addresses are still remembered for their felicity, and close application to the experiences and problems of life. His ministry was eminently successful, and when he felt constrained to

respond to the call of duty elsewhere, it was with sincere and deep regret that the pastoral relationship was severed. The fragrance of his memory still lingers in the church, and on this one hundred and seventy-fifth anniversary of the church he served for sixteen years so honorably, and faithfully, and fruitfully, we send to him in his home in La Grange, Ill., our heartfelt thanks for all he wrought while here, and offer the prayer that his pathway may have across it the golden light of a peaceful age, and the blessed presence of Him who walked in the vesper hours toward Emmaus, and filled with speechless joy the companions at His side.

Of all the pastors who have served this church it was my privilege to know personally but one—the beloved Rev. Benjamin Adams Robie, who ministered to this people from 1884 until 1900, a period of sixteen years. Mr. Robie was called to this church from Groton, Mass., where he had labored for ten years with signal ability. I met him for the first time fifteen or sixteen years ago. The longer I knew him the more strongly was I drawn to him. The graciousness of his manner, the refinement of his bearing, the sweetness of his spirit, the generosity and fineness of his treatment of one younger than he,—all this has left a beautiful and ineffaceable impression on my mind. It was always a pleasure to me to be in his society. There was such an innate delicacy of manner; such a high toned and manly attitude toward life; such seriousness of survey of different questions; such unusual attractiveness of personality that I have never ceased to cherish his memory. I have frequently said to myself since knowing him, what the Rev. George A. Putnam said at his funeral:

“He had so many excellencies that I had not, that I could always put myself to school to him to my profit.” Mr. Robie was a popular, attractive preacher. He rarely preached doctrinal sermons. They were eminently practical, and related themselves to every day living. “The man is the style,” a great French writer once said, and this held true of our dear friend. He was not by temperament nor taste, a doctrinal preacher. He was a noble knight, clothed in shining mail, who rode abroad with high chivalric spirit to fight the battles of his Lord, and to bring in the sweet days of righteousness.

It was during the pastorate of Mr. Robie that the splendid improvements were initiated and carried out at a cost of \$11,000, which have made our church one of unusual beauty. The whole interior of the church, floor and galleries, was taken out, leaving only the walls of the old church standing. When the people resumed their services, they met amid the delicate and harmonious colors of a new Sanctuary, whose memorial windows, the gifts of many friends, lend a distinct and perpetual beauty to our house of worship.

It is, after all, but an imperfect sketch of this church and its historic life which I have given you this morning. There is much more that might be said. I am profoundly conscious that it is not the minister alone, who has kept the flame of faith burning in its golden candle-stick through these one hundred and seventy-five years. There has been a long line of devout, efficient and praying men, and a multitude of saintly women who have created, from generation to generation, the atmosphere and environment in which the Church of the Living God



has been able to radiate its influence. There have been teachers in the Sunday School, and Superintendents, who have stood by their tasks with a fidelity, a courage, and a patience which will not go without their rich reward. There have been players on stringed instruments, and singers with sweet voices, who have refreshed many a weary pilgrim on his journey Zion-ward, who deserve to be remembered for their loving and self-sacrificing labors. How beautiful it would be to call each one by name this morning, and express our gratitude for their part in the service of the King. He who keeps His loved ones written, as it were, on the palms of His hands, knows them all. He it is who has promised: "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life."



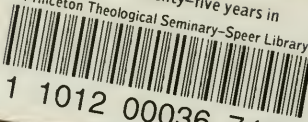




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